

Getting to Know Jesus

Jesus' Fictional Lineage

Although Christians insist that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, both Matthew and Luke go to the trouble of spelling out the details of Jesus' lineage back to David.

1) What does that lineage have to do with anything, since Joseph was not Jesus' biological father?

2) Even if the lineage were germane, the two versions of it are irreconcilable. How can you claim that the Bible is the inerrant, infallible word of God when you have such a glaring contradiction? They can't both be right. So at least one must be wrong. So how can the Bible be infallible?

3) Many of the names in these genealogies are fictitious. Many of the names are not of patriarchs, but older gods. Did the authors of these gospels (whoever they were) really think nobody would check out the details? Where was that holy spirit while these guys were busy making stuff up for the "infallible" word of God?

Christians often claim that one lineage is for Joseph's line, and the other is for Mary's. There is no factual basis for that conclusion. These verses do nothing to establish Jesus' lineage to David. There is no such lineage.

Jesus of Nazareth?

Jesus is often referred to in the Bible as *Jesus of Nazareth*. Not because he was born there, but because he grew up there.

It is strange, then, that there was no such place as Nazareth in the Old Testament, or on early maps of the holy land, or in the writings of Josephus, a respected Christian historian of

that era. Nazareth didn't exist until later -- a city near Mt Carmel.

Strange, don't you think?

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When historians do their research on a historical character or event, they look for as many sources as they can find. Ideally, each source

- lived at the time of the character or event being studied;
- was objective and disinterested (impartial) in his observations, and did not rely on hearsay;
- worked independently of other sources on the subject, without collaboration;
- is consistent with other sources, providing a foundation of reliable information.

What do scholars have to work with in the case of Jesus of Nazareth? Not much.

If Jesus is all he's cracked up to be, no more important character ever walked the face of the earth. Therefore, we should reasonably expect to find plenty of historical information about him. But we don't. What do Greek and Roman sources tell us about this key historical figure during his lifetime and during the rest of the first century (to around 100 CE)? Nothing at all. We have no birth record of Jesus. We have no records of his trial, his death, his teachings, or his significance. Surely the pagans, who rejected his teachings, would have left some record of discussions about him, attacks made against him, disputes about his religious views, or challenges to his teachings, ideas, and beliefs. Not so. His name is never mentioned in pagan sources during the first century.

There is an abundance of pagan Greek and Roman historical sources from the first century, but they don't mention Jesus. From 112 CE,

we have Pliny the Younger mentioning a group of Christians who were meeting illegally, but it sheds no light on Jesus himself. In the year 115, Tacitus, in his history of Rome, mentions the burning of Rome, noting that Nero, who set the fire, blamed Christians. Tacitus explains that the group got their name from Christus . . . who was executed at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius. Again, that tells us nothing about what Jesus said or did. Prior to the year 130, these two brief passages are all scholars have found among pagan sources in their search for the historical Jesus.

There are also a few non-Christian Jewish sources during the first century. Only one mentions Jesus. Famous Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote (about 90 CE) a 20-volume history of the Jewish people. In it he mentions James, the brother of Jesus, who is called the messiah. The only other mention of Jesus is the following passage. To understand it, we need to know a bit about the author.

Josephus was considered a traitor to the Jewish cause in the war against Rome. Therefore, Jews did not copy his writings during the Middle Ages. However, Christians did. But it appears they made a few editorial additions of their own in the process. Those appear in blue.

At this time there appeared Jesus, a wise man if indeed one should call him a man, for he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who received the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among many Jews and among many of Greek origin. He was the Messiah. And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously did not cease to do so. For he appeared to them on the third day, living again, just as the divine prophets had spoken of these and

countless other wondrous things about him. And up until this very day the tribe of Christians, named after him, has not died out.

It is certainly significant that the most prominent first-century Jewish historian knew a few things about Jesus, but it still doesn't offer much help in getting to know who Jesus was, what he said, did, and taught – even with the later Christian embellishment. It doesn't tell us about the circumstances leading to his arrest and death.

That leaves us with the Bible as the only significant source of information about Jesus. And most of the Bible doesn't have much to offer, either. Paul didn't know Jesus or the disciples personally, so we could hardly expect him to be a wealth of first-hand information. He talks about Jesus' death and resurrection, but offers very little about Jesus before that. He mentions that Jesus was a Jew; he ministered to Jews; he had 12 disciples, and brothers, one named James. He mentions what Jesus said at the Last Supper. He mentions a couple of Jesus' teachings – his followers should not get divorced, and they should pay their preachers.

That leaves the four gospels as our only significant source of information about Jesus. But these authors, whoever they were, fall far short of the ideal sources described above. They were not disinterested, objective eyewitnesses. The gospels were written 35 to 65 years after Jesus' death, based on oral traditions, full of contradictions and inconsistencies, liberally embellished or edited by the gospel authors. The authors spoke a different language than Jesus, and they lived in a different country than Jesus. There was collaboration between the gospel authors, because Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source.

The result is not a reliable accounting of the life and teachings of Jesus, but in the synoptic

gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke) we have the only source available. Surprisingly, we can learn quite a bit about Jesus from them, in spite of their inconsistencies and contradictions.

Humanity of Jesus

Christians tell us that Jesus was fully human and fully divine simultaneously. Really?

Did Jesus ever have sex with a woman? With a man? Sheep? Didn't he get horny? Maybe he just beat off a lot. He was tempted for 40 days by the devil in the wilderness. But he wasn't tempted by Mary Magdalene? Come on. She was a hottie.

Was he a parent? Did he ever have to get up in the middle of the night to change a diaper, feed a baby, or convince a child that (s)he was not in imminent danger of being devoured by a monster? Did he have to get up before dawn every morning and go to work? Did he return home at night, exhausted, only to repeat the cycle the following day? Did he have to try to explain to a wife why he had to go out and heal the sick instead of spending more time with her and the children?

Did Jesus ever get diarrhea? Did he ever throw up? Have a headache? A toothache? A hangover? Appendicitis? Jock itch? Constipation? The heartbreak of psoriasis?

He had several brothers. Did he experience sibling rivalry? Did he ever have to stand up to a bully as a kid? Was he ever late paying his taxes? Did he ever get fired? Did he ever apply for a job? Did he ever get dumped by a girl? Or socked in the nose? Did he play sports? Did he ever get grounded or scolded for not taking out the garbage? Did he ever just goof off all day?

If Jesus ever did any of the kinds of things that most humans experience, we don't know about it from the Bible. And that is our only source of

information about him. There is no reliable historical or archeological evidence of his ever having lived at all. Anyone with any knowledge of the Bible knows very well that the four gospels are not a reliable source of historical information about Jesus (or anyone else).

How many fully human beings do you know who live(d) a lifestyle remotely resembling what we think we know about Jesus?

Still not convinced? Consider this. Christians tell us that all men sin. We are born into sin, thanks to Adam and Eve. Did Jesus sin? If not, he couldn't have been human. If he did, he couldn't have been divine. Nor did Jesus even claim to be divine in the synoptic gospels. That was something conjured up long after his death.

Anyone with a modicum of intellectual integrity must agree that the notion of Jesus being simultaneously fully human and fully divine is fully folly. There is nothing except blind faith to suggest that he was either. Yet, if he was not both, the entire Christian paradigm disintegrates.

If Jesus had lived during the Middle Ages, he would have torn the Church apart, judging from what he did in the Temple. If he had lived during the Inquisition, he would have been burned at the stake, because Jesus was a Jewish apocalyptic prophet, not a Christian. If Jesus were alive today, he would not be a Christian. He would still be a Jew. He would move to Israel and probably get himself killed again.